

LIFE ON THE VINE



ABIDE

PREPARE

Read all the Scriptures listed above. Meditate on Jesus' metaphor of the vine in John 15. Consult a concordance and a Bible dictionary to find out where and how the image of vine or vineyard is used in Scripture.

Then compare Jesus' parable of the fig tree in Luke 13:6-9 with parallel passages in Matthew 21:18-19 and Mark 11:12-14. Why does Jesus give the fig tree a bad rap?

Consider the similarities and differences between the parable in Luke and Jesus' cursing the fig tree in Matthew and Mark. What do you make of the detail in Luke that the fig tree was planted in a vineyard?

Read Chapter 1 in Kenneson's *Life on the Vine*. Think about what evidence you see that the church at large (or *your* church) has difficulty forming disciples who embody the fruit of the Spirit. Note Kenneson's description of "culture." Reflect on "those shared practices, convictions, institutions and narratives that order and give shape" to the community (culture) of which you are a part.



Invite several group members to supply the fruit to share during the meeting time. This week's suggestion is to provide a sampling of *nine* different fruit types, corresponding to the nine fruits in Paul's lists: grapes, apples, pears, citrus, melons, figs, plums, nectarines, and strawberries.

Set up the room: Have the items ready for the welcome table as well as Bibles and copies of the learner guide for group members.

PRAY

Pray Psalm 1:1-3 aloud, picturing in your mind a tree by streams of water.

GATHERING AT THE TABLE FOR FRUIT-BEARING

In Advance

Prepare the welcome table by arranging the bowl(s) or tray(s) of fruit brought in to share. Open the Bible to Galatians 5 and place the white pillar candle or taper nearby. Be sure to have matches or a lighter handy for the person designated to light the candle.

As People Arrive

Greet everyone. Introduce newcomers and visitors to other class members. Keep in mind that bearing the fruit of the Spirit begins the moment the first person walks in the door.

To Open

Just prior to getting started, pass around the fruit so those who've arrived can enjoy it. Reserve a portion of the fruit (for instance, a single bunch of grapes) as a display on the worship table. Once it's time to start, call attention to the worship table. Invite everyone to focus on the fruit on the table as you read aloud Galatians 5:22-23. Light (or have someone else light) the Christ candle on the worship table.

Note: If your group has a routine for expressing prayer concerns, making announcements, etc., plan to complete those activities before reading Galatians.

Conclude the gathering time with prayer. Consider using Psalm 1:1-3 as the starting point.

EXPLORING THE ROOTS OF FRUIT-BEARING

Ask someone to read aloud the statements under "On Growing Grapes" on page 2 of the participant guide.

Based on this general understanding of vine-growing, ask the group to identify the key to the successful cultivation of grapes. Then discuss these questions:

- ◆ Why is pruning important for growing grapes?
- ◆ What's the logic in waiting three years before harvesting any fruit?
- ◆ How would you describe the relationship between nurture (i.e., the grower) and nature (i.e., sun, soil, rain) in the production of grapes?

Now hear John 15:1-27 read aloud, listening for what words or phrases are repeated. Then discuss these questions (also in the learner's guide):

- ◆ What word sums up each of the three dimensions of the believer's life set forth in this passage—relation to Christ, relation to one another, relation to the world?

- ◆ What insights into those three dimensions of the believer's life does the image of the vine make possible?
- ◆ What do you think Jesus had in mind when he talked about the necessity of pruning (v. 2)?
- ◆ What is Jesus saying about the connection between obedience and fruit-bearing?
- ◆ According to Jesus, what are the consequences of *not* bearing fruit? What are the consequences of bearing fruit?
- ◆ Jesus uses the term "abide" (NRSV, KJV) or "remain" (NIV) often in this passage. In using that term, what actions or attitudes on the part of believers does he call for?

EXAMINING THE CHALLENGES TO FRUIT-BEARING

Read the excerpt from Kenneson's book (see page 4 in the participant guide). Call attention to the question: "*Why does the church in this time and place seem to have such difficulty forming disciples who embody in their daily lives the distinctiveness of the Spirit?*" Hear responses to that question.

Point out that one way Kenneson answers his question is by implicating the powerful "cultivating" force of our own culture. Say Kenneson's definition of culture: "*those shared practices, convictions, institutions and narratives that order and give shape to the lives of a particular group of people*" (p. 21).

- ◆ What would you say are some of the practices, convictions, institutions, and narratives that order your congregation's life? That order your life? That order the life of most people in the community where you live?

Hear Isaiah 5:1-7 and Luke 13:6-9 read aloud. Point out that both Isaiah and Jesus issue warnings to God's people: not bearing fruit carries consequences.

Knesson suggests that in order to avoid becoming like a trampled vineyard or a barren fig tree, the church needs to confront the challenge of mass culture:

- ◆ By discerning between those forces in our culture that inhibit and those forces that encourage fruitful Christian living.
- ◆ By pruning from our lives some of those actions or activities that do not lead to growth in faith.
- ◆ By recognizing that the purpose of bearing fruit is to embody the mission of God in Christ.

Form smaller groups to talk about ways to implement each of those three suggestions.

BEARING FRUIT IN THE WORLD

Close by connecting Word and image.

Form a circle with everyone standing and facing *outward*, rather than inward. Have everyone reach across the two persons on their immediate right and left, and join hands with the *second* two persons on either side. The idea is to have each person touching four people and to create an intertwining of hands, reminiscent of a vine. Facing outward signifies that our fruit-bearing is for others not for ourselves.

In the circle, pray using these words from Psalm 80:14.

*Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven, and see;
have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted.
They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.
But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
Then we will never turn back from you;
give us life, and we will call on your name.*